DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 045 325 RE 003 181

AUTHOR Braun, Frederick G.
TITLE The Child from Six to Eight--Developmental Growth Patterns.
PUB DATE 7 May 70
NOTE 12p.: Paper presented at the conference of the International Reading Association, Anaheim, Cal., May 6-9, 1970

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.70
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Environment, *Classroom Techniques, *Growth Patterns, *Primary Grades, *Reading Instruction, Student Teacher Relationship, Teacher Role

ABSTRACT

A major part of the primary school day is devoted to reading instruction. However, current practices in many classrooms interfere with growth patterns on which the ability to read is dependent. To alleviate this the teacher should have more freedom to interact with individual children, greater flexibility in scheduling and adaptation of materials to fit the child, and further training to become a better decision-maker in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and management. These changes in teacher practices can make the learning-teaching process more relevant and enjoyable to both teacher and child. The classroom environment must be arranged to provide for self-directedness through child planning and decision-making, to encourage the building of a positive self-concept by creating an atmosphere which is free of fear and failure, to develop good interpersonal relationships by making time available for the teacher and child to work together, and to give children a chance to associate with all of their peers. References are included. (Author/DE)

ED045325

Frederick G. Braun
University of Hawaii
1776 University Avenue
Honolulu, Hawaii 96822

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

THE CHILD FROM SIX TO EIGHT--DEVELOPMENTAL GROWTH PATTERNS

Thursday, May 7, 1970

4:00-5:00 p.m.

Introduction

In the United States, a major portion of the primary school day is devoted to reading instruction. This is also true for many students throughout the world. However, the practices that are presently in use in most of these classrooms interfere with growth patterns on which the ability to read is dependent. Reading problems are thus created by the school, the institution expressly assigned the task of teaching children to read. The damage incurred is not limited to the difficulty in reading the printed word, but includes the loss of zeal by children who have the potential to become outstanding readers.

The Hawaii State School System is presently directing its efforts to the changing of teacher behavior as a means of enhancing the intellectual

RE003 181

growth patterns of young children, through an organized system which focuses upon the individual learner.

The Need for Change

United States Commissioner of Education James E. Allen, in his address to the National Association of State Boards of Education, The Right to Read-Target for the 70's, has challenged the schools. The statistics he presents, showing the results of past efforts to teach people to read, reveal the magnitude and social consequences of reading failures within the United States.

"- - One out of every four students, nationwide, has significant reading deficiencies.

- - In large city school systems, up to half of the students read below expectation.

- - There are more than three million illiterates in our adult population.

- - About half of the unemployed youth, ages 16-21, are functionally illiterate.

- - Three-quarters of the juvenile offenders in New York City are two or more years retarded in reading.

- - In a recent U.S. Armed Forces program called Project 100,000, 68.2% of the young men fell below grade seven in reading and academic ability.

The tragedy of these statistics is that they represent a barrier to success that for many young adults produces the misery of a life marked by poverty, unemployment, alienation and, in many cases, crime.... For the majority who do acquire the basic reading skills, there can also be a barrier which limits the fulfillment of their right to read. This barrier exists when the skill of reading is not accompanied by the desire to read."(1)

Support for this position can be found in sources other than within the political scene. Spache and Spache, in their book, Reading in the Elementary School, contend that one child in three may be considered an under-achiever.(10) Professor Kiyoshi Makita, of the Neuropsychiatric Department of Keio University, Tokyo, investigated the reading standards of 10,000 Japanese children, and found that fewer than one percent had difficulty in reading. The extraordinary statistical discrepancies that show that there are ten times more disabled young readers in Western countries than in Japan, calls attention to the need for concern, investigation and action.(8)

The school's inability to help children learn to read often goes unnoticed when labels are given them which indicate that the cause of the problem is beyond the ability of the school to reconcile. Such labels as disadvantaged, emotionally disturbed, low I.Q. and dyslexic, indicate that the problem is outside the scope of the school. The effect of this extensial categorization,caused by American provincialism which presumes that large numbers of children are incapable of reading effectively, is that it perpetuates instructional techniques that should be changed. The successful results in the teaching of reading, reported by open-structured Infant Schools in Great Britain can serve as an inspiration to educators in the United States. Featherstone asserts that in these schools, reading problems have been reduced to approximately one percent, and if these children were allowed to stay one more year, the problems would be virtually eliminated.(4)

Some educational researchers are asking why American schools have many more boys than girls needing remedial reading, as compared to a similar

group of children in Germany, where reading is more of a problem for girls than for boys.(10)

Claims that a particular reading method provides a panacea, whether based upon a sight, phonics or linguistic approach, are to be questioned.. Also, publishing companies, in their enthusiasm to promote their product, can foster the false concept that there is an easy remedy to the complex process of reading. Sheldon, Stinson and Peebles' study, which compared three approaches to reading instruction, shows that there was no significant difference in the three programs.(7) Harris and Serwer in their report, Comparing Reading Approaches In First Grade Teaching with Disadvantaged Children, concluded that success in reading was most dependent upon the teacher's ability to teach reading.(5) Donald Durrell, in his speech to the International Reading Association Convention in Seattle, concluded, from his investigation of reading achievement among first grade children, that high achievement was due to effective use of learning time rather than the use of a particular reading series.(3)

These studies indicate that improvement of reading achievement requires a change in teacher behavior. The closed, over-structured, teacher-controlled learning environment should yield to a more open-structured learning environment which allows the child greater control over his learning, and an opportunity to use learning time more effectively. Let us not confuse an open-structured learning environment with "progressive education". Many teachers misinterpreted Dewey's philosophy and believed that a child will automatically move toward more sophisticated learnings. William Brownell found this not to be the case as early as 1941, when he discovered that children will continue to perseverate behavior in arithmetic,

unless moved to more mature levels of understanding.(2)

Before a child enters school, he is free to explore and learn from his total environment. During the five or six years of learning in a pre-school open-structured situation, the majority of children have mastered the linguistic structure of our language and enter school with a speaking vocabulary between 2400 and 17,000 words.(9) An interesting criticism of our over-structured schools can be epitomized with the phrase from John Holt's book, Why Children Fail: "If we taught children to speak, they would never learn."(6) This extravagant statement may serve as a stimulus to reevaluate the closed environment which has become a bottleneck to learning.

Teachers need to break the three group intellectual caste system and the recipe approach of the basal reader which dominates the teaching of reading. Daily, children are being forced to do reading activities which are boring, too difficult or have little relevance to real life. Those who have read To Kill a Mocking Bird, may recall Scout's encounters with Miss Caroline, who refused to accept Scout's ability to read and write because it interfered with her teaching. At the other extreme, are those children who do not have necessary prerequisites for reading a primer but are forced to meet failure daily because the teacher has neither the philosophical base nor the management skills for taking achild from "where he is" to a new level of achievement. There does not appear to be one "correct" sequence of reading skills. For example, some readers, based upon a phonics approach, place the teaching of vowels before teaching consonants, linguistic readers differ in the their sequence of word patterns, and other basal readers differ in the size and type of sight vocabulary

that is to be initially developed before introducing certain word recognition skills. Therefore, to become compulsively tied to a particular basal reader series or programmed materials is not necessary nor is it beneficial to the learner. Teachers defend their dependence on them, stating that parents and principals require their use. In some states, such as California, the legislature mandates the use of state adopted texts; some school districts in other states adopt a single series or school staffs decide that they will base their reading program around one published series. This policy fits the child to the materials rather than providing the teacher with an opportunity for making proper diagnosis and prescribing the materials which fit the child's learning style, vocabulary level and pace at which the child can assimilate new concepts and skills.

New Teacher Behaviors

Intellectually, teachers agree that individual differences exist; however, at the operational level, these same teachers still teach groups of children. In Hawaii, new models use an open-structured primary classroom setting in which the pupils make learning decisions, thus blending a new humanism with an intellectual environment that will cultivate positive self-concepts along with basic academic learnings. The instruction of specific facts and skills have been relegated to software and machines. For instance, learning time is increased by children drilling each other with flashcards, using language masters for drill purposes or appropriate programmed materials, thus alleviating waiting time for children which occurs when a teacher attempts to drill and test children within a group. Such activity requires a new set of behaviors for both teacher and children. The new learning environment delegates routine classroom business to the

pupil and it contains many learning centers in which the child selects and plans his learning activities for a part of the day. The learning atmosphere is one of freedom for the child to plan, to make decisions, accept responsibility and evaluate his behavior. Once the teacher has trained the children to work independently, and both are freed from an over-controlled environment, the teacher can perform in a more effective manner. More time is provided for conferring with children, helping them to evaluate their learning behavior, developing new concepts and skills with small groups of children, discussing creative ideas and furnishing opportunities to use their newly acquired knowledge in real life situations.

Teacher Decision-Making

In order to provide a successful open-structured program, it is necessary to organize materials and activities so that the student and teacher have clear-cut objectives which when met are observable to the pupils and the teacher. An attempt will now be made to describe an open-structured program which incorporates activities that many superior teachers have employed intuitively, but are now identified and combined with strategies which personalize learning.

Teachers who are philosophically sympathetic toward an open-structured program which focuses on the child, but are concerned with implementation, need to develop a plan which brings philosophy and operation together. Program planning commences with teacher decisions in the areas of curriculum, instruction and management. Decisions regarding curriculum necessitate preparing a priority of objectives for each child. This means that the teacher must know what objectives comprise the content area, what are the necessary work study skills a child must have in order to handle instructional

tasks that will meet the content objectives, and what activities will build accompanying positive attitudes for learning. Once the teacher has made appropriate curriculum decisions, a judgment is made regarding the best method of instruction: large group, small group, peer group teaching, independent study or a composite of some or all.

Management fuses planning with operation by providing appropriate time allotments, materials, equipment, and traffic patterns. It directs the role of the teacher, which may be that of information-giver, through the means of direct teaching, or as a monitor, assessing behavior of pupils as they work independently or in groups.

Application of a Theoretical Framework

From this theoretical framework, application to a primary classroom will be described in terms of objectives and procedures.

A teacher might choose as the objective for initiating the reading process the following: Each child will recognize his first name and use this skill in taking his own daily attendance. The procedure will begin with teacher assessment through working with random groups of children, checking their ability to recognize their first name. Random grouping is important because it will minimize the teacher's preset ideas about particular children and it provides an opportunity for children to be together on a heterogeneous basis. Once the teacher has assessed the pupils, decisions are made regarding instructional strategy for each child. Children who know both their first and last names may work independently in a learning center which develops additional vocabulary such as color or number words. Children who know their first name but not their last name may form an instructional group in which the teacher provides

appropriate instruction and practice materials. Students who have difficulty or cannot recognize their name form another instructional group in which direct teaching of their first name is carried out.

Management of this learning environment may require the following: attendance charts in which those children who know their names, find their name from a stack of name cards and place it in the proper chart pocket and additional attendance charts with only a few names listed, on which children place a ticket to show that they are present. Thus, by providing appropriate materials, each child has a purpose for learning to read because he is responsible for taking his attendance, and can succeed at this task. Teacher knowledge of the reading continuum makes it possible to provide materials in learning centers which develop listening skills, writing skills, phonic skills and low organization skills such as patterning, as well as an opportunity for those children who are reading to pursue books of interest in a library center.

Larger and more flexible time allotments are used, reducing the pressures produced by rigid daily tiem periods. Scheduling consists of setting the length of time a teacher will work on an objective, possibly two weeks in this particular example, and the amount of time spent daily in which children work individually, assuming in this instance two hours of uninterrupted time. With this type of ind'vidualized instructional management, the teacher works with small instructional groups, members of which remain in the group only as long as teacher supervision is necessary. Once the child understands the skill, additional practice can be pursued in a learning center, rather than working directly with the teacher. The large block of time and the training of children to work independently, make it

possible for the teacher to observe children while they individually pursue activities which develop beginning reading skills.

The following example will illustrate how all children can be exposed to important educational objectives, rather than limiting these objectives to only those who are academically talented. In this instance, the objective will be that the child will be able to state or write the "main idea" from a set of materials presented to him. The procedure used would be to group children homogeneously according to the child's ability "to use reading material". Those children who read well and can use the skill of "main idea" are provided opportunities to apply this skill, through independent study. A possible special project might be the converting of a story to a play. Students who have the necessary word recognition skills but have not developed the concept of "main idea" form an instructional group in which a basal reader may be utilized for perfecting this skill. The children whose word recognition, rhythm and phrasing are weak would be taught this skill through pictorial materials, alleviating the dependence upon word recognition. At the end of a pre-determined time period, the teacher makes notations regarding those children who still need additional help before they will have met the objective. When the teacher returns to this skill, she may find that the prior efforts have established readiness and some of these children had obtained the skill of "main idea" on their own.

During the allotted period devoted to the "main idea" objective, the teacher also works with groups of children with a range of reading abilities providing an opportunity to focus on the application of this skill. Friendship, thematic, or information-giving groups furnish an opportunity for the less mature to see and work with more mature children who become

positive models. It also provides an audience for the more capable student to share his knowledge.

In summary, by taking the teacher out of the apex and freeing her to interact with individual children; providing greater flexibility in time schedules and adapting materials to fit the child; helping teachers become better decision-makers in the areas of curriculum, instruction and management; the learning-teaching process will be not only relevant but enjoyable to both teacher and child. The school environment needs to provide for self-directedness through child planning and decision-making, encouraging the building of a positive self-concept by creating an atmosphere which is free of fear and failure, developing good interpersonal relationships by making time available for the teacher and child to work together, and giving children a chance to associate with all of their peers.

Life is a mosaic, and our job as educators is to help children obtain the tools that fit the pieces together into a life style that will bring meaningfulness, success and happiness.

REFERENCES

1. Allen, James E., Jr. The Right To Read--Target For the 70's, Address before the 1969 Annual Convention of the National Association of State Boards of Education, Los Angeles, California, September 23, 1969.

2. Brownell, William A. Arithmetic in Grades I and II, Duke University Press, Durham, N. C., 1941.

3. Durrell, Donald. Distinguished Speakers Address before the International Reading Conference, Seattle, Washington, April 1967.

4. Featherstone, Joseph. "The Primary School Revolution in Britain," The New Republic, Nov. 1967.

5. Harris, Albert J. and Blanche L. Serwer. "Comparing Reading Approaches in First Grade Teaching With Disadvantaged Children," The Reading Teacher, Vol. 19, Number May, 1966, pgs. 631-635, 642.

6. Holt, John. How Children Fail, Dell Publishing Company, Inc., N. Y., N. Y., 1964.

7. Sheldon, William D., Franga Stinson, and Peebles, James D. "Comparison of three methods of teaching reading: a continuation study in the third grade," The Reading Teacher, Vol. 22, No. 6, March 1969, pgs. 539-546.

8. Shields, Robert. "Roman Alphabet Too Abstract," Honolulu Star-Bulletin and Advertiser, Honolulu, HI, October 13, 1968.

9. Smith, Nila B. Reading Instruction for Today's Children, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1963.

10. Spache and Spache. Reading In the Elementary School, Allyn and Bacon, Boston, Mass., 1969.